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Another

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Anika Jensen is a first year student who plans to major in English with a writing concentration and Civil War Era studies.

Another

Anika N. Jensen

“Another” stared up at her in italics, not for the first time that April. She laid the papers flat on the fake mahogany desk in front of her and lined up the edges, careful to keep a straight vertical line from her shoulders to her hips. Her producer taught her to place one hand on the polished surface, to lean forward just enough to catch the eye of the thirty-two-year-old watching from the weight room that didn’t much care for local news. Her dress that day was black, practical, cut deep below her collar bones.

“Another.” There was no need to read the script to know what “another” implied. It would be another dead child, another teacher or father or sociopath whose brief terror would be recounted and forgotten when the next shot ricocheted from newsroom to newsroom.

When she curled her hair that morning, she didn’t feel the void that came with the news of another shooting. Driving to work against the black sky that was just beginning to lighten, she listened to Norah Jones, not the sound of a twin sister screaming.

“Another mass shooting devastated a small Vermont town yesterday.”

As a teenager, she only knew Columbine.

“Police are investigating the possible motives of the perpetrator who killed himself and three others at a local high school.”

There was Virginia Tech, then she lost count.

An intern approached her during a commercial break, a thin boy with headphones draped around his neck. “It must be hard,” he said, handing her a water bottle.

She stood to adjust her dress, which clung to her body in places she did not prefer. “Not anymore.” Her silver bracelet slipped from her wrist, a gift from her mother that had never fit. “It’s just a routine. Same words.” Another.

“Doesn’t that make it worse?” The intern had a deep voice that hardly matched his scrawny form. “Repetition of a ghastly thing.” She would have told him to go had she not noticed a blink of sorry curiosity in his eyes, the kind he might have had when passing a dead animal in the road: he wouldn’t want to see its broken body, yet he wouldn’t want to look away, either.

“It only makes *me* worse,” she finally told him, a sad, self-depreca-

tory laugh escaping her full lips. She took a sip of water, leaving the cap off. "I have to look concerned enough to show that I care, but I can't stray from monotone." A sigh drifted out from deep inside her. "It's just a formula. Use your droopy eyes, but only a tiny bit. You need to be professional, still."

Afraid she was revealing too much, she studied the intern's face. He had deep ridges in his skin for a person so young, but no sign of disinterest or fright. He was leaning toward her slightly, one arm on the desk in front of him, intrigued.

She took another sip of water. "Sometimes I forget that it even happened. I'm just reading a script."

From the far wall, she heard a thirty second warning. The intern left, looking at her from behind a camera that hid almost all of him.

"We've been informed that the shooter had a history of mental health issues."

It was four o'clock and her shift ended. She swiveled in her chair while she straightened her papers again, overhearing words of melancholy and pity that swirled into the mix of deep voices and sad voices and those with little regard.

Her producer wandered over with stale coffee still on his lips. "Well done," he told her. "Well composed. You never break, I like that. I can trust you."

She tried not to stiffen when his hand lingered too long on her shoulder.

On weak knees she wobbled to the water cooler, where the intern was standing with his hands deep in his khaki pockets.

"I can't believe they make you wear those," he said. He pointed to her shoes, high and polished and black. "No one can even see them past the desk."

She laughed, and tucked an unraveling curl behind her ear. "I wear what I'm told to."

"A well-dressed storyteller," he called her.

"More of a paperboy," she said.

It was ten minutes after four and she had forgotten the four dead in Vermont. She returned to the desk before leaving, having tied her hair back with a rubber band, when the studio door clicked shut.

As the burdened footsteps paced toward her, she looked to the intern, huddled beneath a table across the room. She reached a hand up to her temple, puzzled to find beads of sweat on her fingers when she removed it. Her bracelet slid to the floor, but she did not bend to retrieve it.

The black barrel before her eyes did not seem deadly; she could have swatted it from her face like a fly in the summer. It did not hiss or growl, nor did it scream. It did not speak Columbine to her. There were no

whispers of politics in the gunman's ears.

She blinked for the last time, so slowly she could count each eyelash. Again, she looked to the intern, but saw only metal. Fear danced on her fingertips.

With a deafening blast, she became another news story.